

CIRCULATION LIST

Members of the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Panel

Linda Wells, Director of Housing and Community Services

Mark Hickson, Head of Housing Management Services

Steve Taylor-Edwards, Interim Head of BFS

Caroline Titley, Chief Executive of Bracknell Forest Homes

Bracknell Forest Homes Board

Cllr Mrs Shelagh Pile

I attach a copy of the minutes of the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Panel meeting held on 20 February 2008.

**Tenants' and Leaseholders' Panel Meeting
20 February 2008**

Present: Peter Maguire (PM) (Chair)
 Herbie Barlow (HBa)
 Bob Begbie (BB)
 Marcella Begbie (MB)
 Henry Bone (HBo)
 Maurice Grant (MG)
 Robert Gristwood (RG)
 Muriel Heaton (MHe)
 Chick Lavender (CL)
 Michael Marsh (MM)
 Barbara McMinnies (BM)
 Trevor Pearson (TP)
 Bill Potts (BP)
 Tim Rawsthorne (TR)
 Derek Sullivan (DS)
 David Weston (DW)

Officers: Joanna Flaxman (JF) – Resident Involvement & Policy Officer
 Michael Leach (ML) – Head of Strategy & Business Systems
 Linda Wells (LW) – Project Director
 Mark Hickson (MHi) – Head of Housing Management

Observers: Sue Cleaver (SC)
 Sheila Lambourne (SL)

		ACTION
	<p>Welcome & Apologies</p> <p>Apologies were received from: Nick Westlake (NW)</p>	
1.	<p>Agreement of Minutes of Last Meeting / Matters Arising</p> <p>The minutes were agreed and signed.</p> <p>There were no matters arising.</p>	
2.	<p>Housing Management Update</p> <p>MHi distributed a report which was discussed. Rent arrears are coming down and rent collected is slightly above target.</p> <p>Number of homes 'in management' is slightly higher than last year - there have been some peaks over the year.</p> <p>Right to Buy (RTB) sales – slight increase this year as people may have rushed to buy before transfer (even though they have the preserved RTB).</p> <p>RG asked about a report he had received as a member of the Adult Social Care & Housing Scrutiny Panel, regarding Housing Benefit and a plan to</p>	

<p>use external Recovery Agents. LW said that this performance indicator applies to Housing Benefit over payments (people who have been paid too much Housing Benefit). The Housing Benefit Department would write to claimants to ask for the money back but if this failed they would bring in a Collection Agent. This is a Council policy. Bracknell Forest Homes have a firm but fair approach to rent collection and Housing Officers will work with tenants to help them pay their rent and on any arrears issues.</p> <p>RG said some tenants will be 4 weeks in arrears when their Housing Benefit is paid to Bracknell Forest Homes. Can they be prevented from getting an arrears letter? LW said this happens as the Council will treat Bracknell Forest Homes as any other Landlord and pay them 4 weeks in arrears. The Bracknell Forest Homes housing system is being programmed to show "notional" arrears which will be covered when the payment is made by Housing Benefit.</p> <p>HBa mentioned 2 increases in the figures - in void times and Court Hearings for possession. MHi said a Court Hearing is taken on a reactive basis e.g. when payments are not made. There is no target to achieve more Court Hearings there have just been more situations like this this year. Regarding voids, the figure is a running average (number of voids divided by re-let time) and it is higher than last year. However, it will not increase as the year runs to an end. There are incentives to get this right as it is lost rent and people are waiting on the waiting list.</p> <p>CL asked why the computer was saying people were a week in arrears on Tuesday. LW said that this was an issue at the Cash Office and it has now been resolved.</p> <p>MHe said she had tried to speak to her Housing Officer this week but she had not come to see her at reception. LW said this was not a good service and the details will be taken and the issue looked into.</p> <p>PM asked about void properties being bought up to the Decent Homes Standard / Bracknell Forest Standard. The Customer Involvement Group visited a property last week which was repaired as a void under the Council. LW said that not all void properties will be bought up to BF Standard because of the way the major works will be done. They will work their way through the estates, and voids will be done when they come up in the works programme. If the void is in the vicinity of the major works programme then it can be done in phases without too much disruption to the programme. If the kitchen / bathroom is in a terrible state it can be replaced. Also some tenants in the area of the property may think it is unfair because a new tenant is getting improvements when they have been waiting a long time.</p> <p>TR asked about void work which was started under the Council. LW said that work will finish and be paid for by the Council. Bracknell Forest Homes will have a supervisory role. For new works Bracknell Forest Homes will have their own contractor.</p>	<p>LW</p>
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<p>3.</p>	<p>Bracknell Forest Homes Update</p> <p>LW said the transfer was completed on 11th February, to target, and thanked everyone who had played a part.</p> <p>On 12th February there was a Press Briefing which was hosted jointly by Bracknell Forest Homes and Bracknell Forest Borough Council. PM had attended. There was some coverage in the Bracknell News & Standard. PM gave a speech at the event and thanked tenants and leaseholders for being involved.</p> <p>Since the transfer Officers have been working to deliver the ‘promises’ in the Offer Document.</p> <p>The Procurement Sub Group is next week – Arthur Appleyard and BM will attend.</p> <p>New Tenancy Agreements are being printed for people to sign. They can be sent back or people can be visited to answer any questions. There will be a Helpline if people have any queries. A Notice has been served to tell tenants that there is a change of Landlord.</p> <p>The rent increase letter will be sent out in the coming weeks. It is a very legalistic notice and it has to be served like this otherwise it is not valid. An explanatory letter will be sent with it. In the future a more ‘customer friendly’ letter will be sent out.</p> <p>Bracknell Forest Services will now be called Bracknell Forest Homes Repairs & Maintenance. An Action Plan will be put together to improve the repairs service and these can be tested with the Customer Involvement Group</p> <p>Part of the Bracknell Forest Homes team is based in the Asmec Centre, Eagle House. LW has moved back to Time Square.</p> <p>TR asked about the launch of Bracknell Forest Homes. He had looked at the website and the address is Time Square and the phone number is that of the Council. Paying Your Rent takes you to a Council page of the website. LW said that until a move is made and new phone numbers are taken up, Council services have to be used. Physical separation would have been ideal from day one but had not been possible. LW said all the finances are all separate and Officers are not based with any other Council staff. The website will be hosted by Bracknell Forest Homes as soon as the move happens.</p> <p>RG asked about the letter which was sent out letting tenants know about the transfer. JF said an e-mail was sent to Panel members and all those with e-mail addresses on the Housing Sounding Board. Letters were sent out as soon as possible after the transfer.</p> <p>CL had reported a repair by e-mail and made a comment that the reply was not detailed enough. This can be passed on.</p>	<p>LW</p>
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	<p>PM had an e-mail from ML with a suggestions about a Satisfaction Survey for repairs and asking Panel views.</p> <p>SP said that the rent increase letter needs to say that the Government set the rents.</p> <p>BM said that the information sent infers that there are 4 Board Members. LW said it means that there are 4 places on the Board for tenants.</p> <p>BM mentioned issues that had occurred in Deansgate with landscaping. Landscape Operatives had been negative about their uniforms and Bracknell Forest Homes. LW said the uniforms were chosen by the Operatives. Since the issue BM raised a manager visited and LW has spoken to Officers. It has been agreed that Operatives will now knock on doors if a radical cut is going to be done on adjacent shrubs. LW apologised for the problems BM and her neighbours had experiences.</p> <p>PM commented about the direct debits and how these need to be changed – guidance needs to be given to tenants. LW said this is being done automatically but agreed that tenants need to be informed of this.</p> <p>Tenant Board Member – an update was given as to the recruitment of the fourth Tenant Board Member. Six people had applied and these have been sent the application form. An information session has been arranged with TPAS for the candidates on 10th March.</p>	
<p>4.</p>	<p>Resident Inspection Programme</p> <p>JF gave more detail of the Resident Inspection Programme. It was discussed and agreed that Bracknell Forest Homes would like to participate in the programme but would like to be inspected later than proposed as we are a new organisation. The first inspection will be on repairs and maintenance.</p>	
<p>5.</p>	<p>Constitution</p> <p>PM said the Officers of the Panel had suggested that separate meetings are held. The first one will be 4th March at 7.30pm. The second meeting will be arranged if needed.</p> <p>There was discussion around whether SP will attend and agreed that she should.</p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p>Treasurers Report</p> <p>CL reported on recent transactions. If anyone has any outstanding expense claims please pass them to CL before the end of the financial year.</p> <p>CL outlined the main expenditure headings for the year and confirmed the current balance.</p> <p>TR asked if the Panel had received all they are entitled to from the council? CL said yes.</p>	

	<p>DS asked if the Board have been asked how much money will be granted to the T&LP? PM said he had discussed this with Caroline Titley but not heard anything back as yet. LW said that there will be a budget for Customer Involvement under Bracknell Forest Homes. If it was felt that the grant should be larger then the group can give a breakdown of what they need extra funds for.</p>	
7.	<p>Feedback from other meetings</p> <p>TR had attended the Health & Social Care Partnership Board meeting. Much of the meeting was regarding the Health Consultation. There are public consultation meetings happening in the area regarding health. DS asked about the future of Heatherwood & Wexham Park Hospitals – these will continue in the future. RG asked about having a hospital in Bracknell and current publicity around services at Heatherwood.</p> <p>MHe said she had attended the Access Panel Meeting and there was discussion regarding Bracknell Station and accessibility and also the provision of disabled parking.</p> <p>Customer Involvement Group – SL said that a void was visited which had been visited before works were done. The general feedback was that it was poor and not attractive to move into. MM said the interviews have taken place for the Tenants Handbook and samples of their work examined, along with the cost taken into account. Five companies had given quotes, three were interviewed and the “middle” costs out of the five was chosen by the four Customers and two Officers. The company does work for Reading Borough Council and were well aware of how to produce information for people with sight difficulties. The companies were scored on interviews and cost. The company chosen is Richfield Graphics and the group who interviewed will be visiting their Print Room next week.</p> <p>PM said he had met with TPAS just before Christmas where a plan of work was proposed. PM asked the Panel whether they wished to proceed with the programme and which parts if not at all. MB asked who would pay for it. PM said that the Customer Involvement budget would have to pay. BM asked how ‘uninvolved’ people would be involved. JF said you may need to give incentives. A vote was taken as to whether the work programme is needed and there was no-one in favour. There was a feeling that more detail was needed as to the aims and outcomes of the work. The Panel wished to ask for more detail on the proposal and what it is for. PM to contact Simon to ask for this.</p>	PM
8.	<p>Any Other Business (including referrals)</p> <p>HBa said he had had a complaint that a repairs appointment was not offered for am or pm. LW said that she would refer this back to Repairs. HBo said that all the tickets that he gets as a tradesman are am or pm.</p> <p>CL gave information about the Local Development Framework – the information concerns housing densities etc. CL can e-mail the questionnaire to everyone but the rest of the information is too large.</p> <p>CL said he has had rewiring done which left holes in his ceiling which he</p>	LW

	<p>has been told he has to plaster himself. There is a lot to be improved on the rewiring work regarding co-ordination between workers, equipment and also that the bulbs are 3 pin and it is very difficult to find these. The specifications need looking at. LW to raise the issue with Karen Novell.</p> <p>RG asked about feedback from 'fun days'. JF said it has not yet been collated but when this is done it can be reported to the panel. We do still need to consult a wider audience and any ideas are welcomed. The questionnaire to the outlying areas received a good response.</p> <p>TP said that the Gas Servicing Appointment was made for a time when convenient without his having to highlight this again. LW said that a new Gas Administration Team has been set up and positive feedback has been passed back to them. HBo said he has had to put labels on people's doors when they have not had gas servicing done because it is important that tenants get this done.</p> <p>MB also gave positive feedback about repairs they have had done in good time.</p> <p>SP said that at the Annual Meeting of the Council she will hopefully stay as T&L Champion. She would like to receive information on the Customer Involvement Group and other information going to tenants.</p> <p>PM said that MHe is resigning from the panel until she can stand for Binfield, as she had moved out of Bullbrook. PM thanked MHe for all her work in Bullbrook and invited her to attend as an Observer at Panel meetings in the future.</p>	<p>LW</p> <p>JF</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Date of Next Meeting</p> <p>Wednesday 19 March 2008, 7pm. Venue TBA</p>	